

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2339

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 15478

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, IN

SUBJ: SIGNS OF GROWING RELUCTANCE TO END THE EMERGENCY

REF: NEW DELHI 14117

SUMMARY: MRS GANDHI AND SOME OF HER KEY ADVISORS ARE HINTING BROADLY THAT THE EMERGENCY WILL NOT END SOON. THESE PUBLIC STATEMENTS, REPORTED BELOW, COINCIDE WITH THE RECENT UNWELCOME DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH AND A NUMBER OF EQUALLY UNWELCOME DEVELOPMENTS ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE, INCLUDING THE NOVEMBER 12 SUPREME COURT DECISION TO TERMINATE ITS "BASIC STRUCTURE" HEARING, AND UNFAVORABLE POLITICAL TRENDS IN SEVERAL KEY STATES. THE ACCUMULATED IMPORT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS LENDS WEIGHT TO THE THESIS THAT IN ORDER TO KEEP THE INITIATIVE MRS GANDHI WILL INCREASINGLY LEAN TOWARD POSTPONEMENT OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS AND CONTINUATION OF THE EMERGENCY. IT HAS ALSO INCREASED SPECULATION OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE NEXT PARLIAMENTARY SESSION (NOW SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY) INTO A NEW "CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY." WE ANTICIPATE THAT THE

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PRIME MINITER WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO TEMPORIZE ON

THE QUESTION OF THE DURATION OF THE EMERGENCY AND THE HOLDING OF ELECTIONS INTO DECEMBER OR EVEN EARLY JANUARY. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, MRS GANDHI AND KEY ADVISORS HAVE BEGON TO RE-EMPHASIZE THE MORE UNCOMPROMISING ARGUMENTS USED TO DEFEND THE EMERGENCY IN THE WEEKS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING ITS PROCLAMATION ON JUNE 26. REFTEL SENT TO THE DEPARTMENT IN OCTOBER (BEFORE THE ALLAHABAD DECISION WAS REVERSED) TRACED A MARKED EVOLUTION FROM THE "HARD LINE" OF THIS EARLIER PERIOD (WHICH COINCIDED WITH A RASH OF CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND REPORTED PLANS TO DRAFT A NEW CONSTITUTION) TO A PUBLIC POSTURE ANTICIPATING AN EARLY END TO THE EMERGENCY, AND PRESERVATION OF THE CONSTITUTION AND THE INDIAN POLCNICAL SYSTEM. IN RECENT DAYS, THE PRIME MINISTER HAS SWITCHED HER MAIN FOCUS TO ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPERATIVES THAT THE EMERGENCY HAS SERVED AND WILL NEED TO CONTINUE TO SERVE IN THE FUTURE.

2. ON NOVEMBER 9, MRS GANDHI WAS WIDELY REPORTED BY THE PRESS AS TELLING A SIDEWALK CROWD OUTSIDE HER HOME THAT THE EMERGENCY WOULD HAVE TO CONTINUE UNTIL THE ATMOSPHERE OF DISCIPLINE PREVAILING IN THE COUNTRY BECAME DURABLE AND LASTING. FOCUSING FURTHER ON THIS POINT LATER IN HER SPEECH, SHE HELD THAT "THE QUESTION" NOW WAS HOW TO MAKE THE "NEW ATMOSPHERE OF DISCIPLINE" A "LASTING FEATURE."

3. IN A PUBLIC SPEECH ON NOVEMBER 1, OLD NEHRU FAMILY RETAINER AND UNION MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND SHIPPING, UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT, WAS REPORTED TO HAVE TOLD CONGRESSMEN IN UP THAT "THE EMERGENCY WILL CONTINUE UNTIL THE GOAL OF WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE IS ACHIEVED." ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, HE STATED IN A NOVEMBER 15 SPEECH TO UP CONGRESSMEN THAT "WHILE THE EMERGENCY WOULD NOT BE UNDULY PROLONGED, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE ENSURED FIRST THAT THE CONDITIONS WHICH LED TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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...EMERGENCY DID NOT REVIVE AFTER IT WAS LIFTED." HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE ADDED THAT "THE EMERGENCY BROUGHT ABOUT AN ENORMOUS IMPROVEMENT IN ALL WALKS OF NATIONAL LIFE. THIS GAIN COULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO FRITTERED AWAY AT ANY COST.... IF THE SUPREME COURT DEBARRED THE GOVERNMENT FROM MAKING CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION, A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY MIGHT BE CALLED TO FRAME A NEW CONSTITUTION GUARANTEEING SOCIAL AND

ECONOMIC JUSTICE. IF THE CONSTITUTION BECAME AN OBSTACLE IN ENSURING BASIC NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE LIKE EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, EQUALITY AND ERADICATION OF SOCIAL EVILS, THEN THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT HESITATE TO MAKE BASIC CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION."

3. MRS GANDHI STRUCK A SIMILARLY TOUGH TONE IN HER NOVEMBER 17 HYDERABAD SPEECH, DELIVERED JUST AFTER HER PRIVATE SECRETARY'S FIRST TWO UNFRUITFUL MEETINGS WITH J.P. NARAYAN (NEW DELHI 15345). THE INDIAN WIRE SERVICES REPORT THAT SHE STRESSED UNITY, STABILITY, DISCIPLINE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS AS THE "NEED OF THE HOUR," HELD THAT "....THE FREEDOM OF INDIVIDUALS CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO TAKE THE WAY OF THE FREEDOM (#) OF THE MASSES OF PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE UNORGANIZED AND CANNOT RAISE THEIR VOICE" AND THAT WHILE "DEMOCRACY" IS IMPORTANT IT COULD ONLY BE "REAL" WHEN THERE WAS GREATER "EQUALITY" AMONG THE PEOPLE. SHE IS QUOTED AS STATING THAT THE EMERGENCY BROUGHT ABOUT SOME DISCIPLINE, INCREASED PRODUCTION, PUT INFLATION UNDER CONTROL AND BROUGHT SOME STABILITY AND THEN ASKING, "CAN THERE BE STABILITY, PEACE AND HARMONY IF THE ECONOMIC GAP BETWEEN HAVES AND HAVE NOTS INCREASED." A NOVEMBER 20 PTI WIRE SERVICE REPORT QUOTES HER AS STATING IN ORISSA THAT "SUCCESS OF THE OPPOSITION ALLIANCE WOULD MEAN FREE PLAY FOR COMMUNAL HATRED AND IMPERIL OUR VERY SECURITY, OUR INTEGRITY AND OUR PROGRESS." CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAREEAH TOLD THE BBC NOV 18 THAT "THINGS WILL RETURN TO NORMAL AS WE SETTLE DOWN AND DISCIPLINE BECOMES HABITUAL WITH THE PEOPLE "THE UNION MINISTER OF STATE FOR INFORMATION TOLD DEPRESSED BOMBAY NEWSPAPER CONFIDENTIAL

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EDITORS EARLIER THIS WEEK THAT THE GOI LIKED THE WAY NEWSPAPERS LOOKED UNDER THE EMERGENCY AND WAS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO ENSURE THAT THIS SITUATION WOULD CONTINUE.

NOTE BY OCT: (#) AS RECEIVED.

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 NEW DELHI 15478

4. ALL THESE PUBLIC STATEMENTS COINCIDE WITH THE RECENT UNWELCOME DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH AND A NUMBER OF EQUALLY UNWELCOME DEVELOPMENTS ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE SINCE THE SUPREME COURT REVERSED THE ALLAHABAD COURT RULING ON NOVEMBER 7. ON NOVEMBER 12, THE SUPREME COURT DECIDED TO SHELVE ITS HEARING ON THE VALIETY OF THE 1973 "BASIC STRUCTURE" DECISION. AT THE STATE LEVEL, THE GUJARAT JANATA" PEOPLES FRONT HAS GOTTEN THE BETTER OF CONGRESS-R IN A NUMBER OF RECENT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. PROSPECTS FOR THE CONGRESS-O ORGANIZATION TO MERGE WITH CONGRESS-R IN DMK CONTROLLED TAMIL NADU FOLLOWING K. KAMARAJ'S DEATH HAVE DIMMED. IN CENSORED SPEECHES, KASHMIR CHIEF MINISTER SHEIKH ABDULLAH HAS CRITICIZED THE EMERGENCY AND CALLED FOR EARLY (1976) ELECTIONS TO THE PRESENTY CONGRESS-CONTROLLED STATE LEGISLATURE. HE HAS ALSO LAUNCHED A NEW PARTY, THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE, WHICH HIS FOLLOWERS (AND THE SHEIKH INDIRECTLY) HOLD WILL BE THE ANSWER TO "WP YEARS OF CONGRES JNSDRUPTION AND MISRULE." BEFORE THE DISBANDING OF THE "BASIC STRUCTURE" SUPREME COURT BENCH JAMMU/KASHMIR/GUJARAT AND CONFIDENTIAL

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TAMIL NADU REPORTEDLY ALL SUBMITTED BJZEFS TO THE SUPREME COURT SUPPORTING PALKIWALA'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST REVIEWING THE RESTRICTION ON PARLIAMENT'S AMENDING POWER. IN KERALA, A CONGRESS-CPI EFFORT TO DRAW THE OPPOSITION KERALA CONGRESS AWAY FROM THE CPM MAY BE

RUNNING INTO TROUBLE. IF THE EFFORT FAILS, THE KERALA ELECTIONS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE POSTPONED AGAIN. J.P. NARAYAN'S APPARENT INTRANSIGENCE IS NEAR CONFIRMATION THAT THE OPPOSITION MAY NOT HAVE "LEARNED ITS LESSON" AND THAT IT MAY BE MORE UNITED THAN EVER AGAINST CONGRESS IN ELECTIONS IF THE EMERGENCY IS LIFTED.

5. THE ACCUMULATED IMPORT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS LENDS WEIGHT TO THE THESIS THAT IN ORDER TO KEEP THE INITIATIVE, MRS GANDHI WILL INCREASINGLY LEAN TOWARD POSTPONEMENT OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS AND CONTINUATION OF TYG EMERGENCY. WE HAVE NOW LEARNED THAT THE NEXT PARLIAMENTARY SESSION (PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED FOR LATE NOVEMBER-DECEMBER) WILL BE POSTPONED UNTIL AFTER THE AICC SESSION ENDS IN EARLY JANUARY. THERE ARE RENEWED REPORTS THAT MRS GANDHI IS AGAIN CONTEMPLATING TRANSFORMING THAT SESSION INTO A NEW "CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY." WHETHER RIGHT OR NOT, THE SPECULATION IS FED BY A FEELING THAT THE PRIME MINISTER IS DETERMINED TO DO SOMETHING DRAMATIC TO REVITALIZE THE COUNTRY ANEW AND TO RESOLVE HER PROBLEMS WITH THE JUDICIARY.

6. WE ARE NOT YET READY TO PREDICT WHAT MRS GANDHI WILL ULTIMATELY DO ON THE EMERGENCY AND ELECTIONS, BUT EXTENSION OF THE FORMER AND POSTPONEMENT OF THE LATTER ARE INCREASINGLY BECOMING THE MORE PLAUSIBLE OPTION. THE PRIME MINISTER IS STILL TEMPORIZING ON THESE TWO BASIC QUESTIONS, HOWEVER, AND MAY CONTINUE TO DO SO UNTIL DECEMBER OR EVEN EARLY JANUARY (NEW DELHI 15069).
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